



Leadership North Carolina Class 33

Education Session
December 9-11, 2025

Speaker Directory

Dr. Kelly Maxwell

Senior Research Scholar
Child Trends

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Kelly Maxwell, Ph.D., is a Senior Research Scholar in Early Childhood Education at [Child Trends](#). She has over 30 years of experience in early childhood research. Her work has focused on early childhood policy issues, quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), child care licensing, kindergarten entry skills, evaluation of early childhood initiatives, use of administrative data, and translating research findings for state policymakers. She currently co-leads the federally-funded project, [The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education](#) (TRLECE). Prior to joining Child Trends in 2013, Kelly served as the Associate Director at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at UNC-CH. She has a long history of working on early childhood-related projects in NC, including co-leading a statewide evaluation of Smart Start in the 1990s; conducting a statewide school readiness assessment project; supporting the state's early childhood advisory council under two Governors and as a member of the advisory council under a third Governor; and serving as lead grant writer and project advisor for NC's Early Learning Challenge grant.

Ms. Amy Cabbage

President
The North Carolina Partnership for Children

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Amy Cabbage is the President of the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC), leading Smart Start, North Carolina's comprehensive early childhood system serving the youngest North Carolinians, their families, and all who care for and educate them. Smart Start is funded through a public-private partnership and consists of a state level organization, NCPC, and 75 local partnerships working in all 100

counties to advance a high-quality, comprehensive, accountable early childhood system that benefits each child in North Carolina beginning with a healthy birth.

Amy began her career as an early childhood teacher, following a family tradition of service to young children and families. She worked as a National Head Start Fellow for the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF), then consulted with early childhood education agencies on a range of topics. She taught advocacy and leadership courses at both Wheelock College and Eastern Connecticut State University and researched and wrote about early care and education. Beginning in 2008, Amy's work focused on the assessment and improvement of early childhood programs, joining the National Center for Research on Early Childhood Education at the University of Virginia and then, in 2010, Teachstone. She served in various roles at Teachstone, managing teacher coaching, training, and professional development, as well as public policy, legal, and strategy work.

Amy completed her undergraduate study at Brown University and went on to complete a J.D. at Northeastern University and an M.S. in Leadership and Policy in Early Childhood Education from Wheelock College. Amy's husband started working in North Carolina in 2018, and Amy followed him and was honored to join Smart Start in August 2020. Their three adult kids have followed paths that bring them to NC frequently, with two in military service and one a graduate from UNC-Chapel Hill now working in emergency medical services. Besides working in the early childhood field, Amy can be found playing, coaching, and watching soccer, her other passion, whenever she can!

Morgan Ford

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Morgan Ford is the Program Director for Building Bright Futures (BBF), an initiative supporting the development and scaling of early childhood education apprenticeships in NC through the North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE). NCBCE, a non-profit that operates out of the Office of the Governor, makes the critical connection between NC employers and the education systems through work-based learning opportunities. Since graduating from the University of Virginia, Ms. Ford has had over 30 years of experience working with and managing community outreach and communications projects for public schools, nonprofits, and local, state, and federal government. As a parent, a sometimes substitute teacher, and a long-time volunteer in preschools and the public schools, Morgan has a passion for supporting students and educators.

Mr. Dan Tetreault

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Dan Tetreault serves as the Assistant Director of Early Learning within the Office of Early Learning at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. He holds a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction Supervision. He started his career in early education as a kindergarten teacher in Haywood County, NC. He began with the Department in 2006 as a state-funded prekindergarten program and policy consultant and has since served in several roles supporting state-wide preschool through grade 3 initiatives.

Ms. Candace Witherspoon

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Candace Witherspoon is the State Director for the Division of Child Development and Early Education at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). She joined the Division in December 2023 as the Deputy Director, transitioning into the Director role officially in March 2025. Prior to joining NC DHHS, Candace served as Senior Director for Policy and Compliance in Special Education Services at Wake County Public School System—the largest school district in the state—where she supported children, families, and schools from Pre-K through 12th grade.

Candace holds Master’s degrees in Education, specializing in Curriculum and Instruction as well as Special Education. With nearly 20 years of distinguished experience in special education, her career spans early intervention programs, public school pre-K initiatives, and comprehensive support for students of all ages and abilities. She has extensive experience collaborating with parents, administrators, and teachers to foster inclusive and effective learning environments.

Throughout her career, Candace has taken on a variety of roles, including teacher assistant, special education teacher, school-level leader, district-level leader, mentor, and coach. Witnessing firsthand the transformative impact of quality early intervention and instruction on a child’s future success, she is deeply committed to ensuring that children and families have access to high-quality early education. Candace’s leadership and participation on multiple coalitions, task forces, and boards focuses on equipping those who run and support these programs with the resources and tools necessary to make lifelong positive impacts for the children and families of North Carolina.

Ms. Samantha Cole

Child Care Business Liaison
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Samantha Cole is the Child Care Business Liaison for the North Carolina Department of Commerce. Prior to joining NC Commerce, Samantha served as Director of Workforce Partnerships with the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County, where she led the organization’s initiatives to connect people experiencing significant barriers to

employment with rewarding opportunities and helped area employers engage with innovative workforce development solutions. In 2023, she joined workforce development, economic development, and post-secondary education colleagues from across the state in becoming part of the nation's first cohort of Certified Workforce Leaders through NC State University's Workforce Development Leadership Initiative. Samantha is passionate about supporting children and families and volunteers as a Guardian ad Litem in the North Carolina court system, as well as on the board of her son's childcare center.

Dr. Jeff Cox

President

North Carolina Community College System

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Dr. Jeff Cox is the 11th president of the North Carolina Community College System and a lifelong champion of North Carolina public education.

Prior to leading the System, Dr. Cox served as the President of Wilkes Community College from 2014 to 2023 where he led a fantastic team of faculty and staff that more than doubled the completion rate at the college, raised \$20 million to support strategic initiatives, and created a five-year strategic plan seen as a national model for other institutions.

Cox formerly served as the Superintendent of Alleghany County Schools from 2005 to 2014. He also has served as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction for Lee County Schools and as an elementary principal and assistant principal in Union County Schools. He began his career as a high school teacher and coach.

In 2017, Dr. Cox was awarded an Aspen Institute Presidential Fellowship for Community College Excellence. He was one of 40 college leaders in the country selected for this prestigious program.

Dr. Cox earned his Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He also has a Master's in School Administration and a bachelor's degree in English—Secondary Education, both of which he earned from Appalachian State University. Dr. Cox and his wife, Reba, have three sons—Dylan, Evan, and Zach; a daughter-in-law, Shae; and one sassy Corgi named Jasmine.

Dr. A. Hope Williams

President

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities

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A. Hope Williams is president of North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), the state office of the 36 private, nonprofit colleges and universities in North Carolina. She works closely with the State of North Carolina and the federal government, and with the North Carolina public K-12 and higher education sectors to address education and related public policy and funding issues. In addition, she oversees fundraising for scholarships and grants and the development of collaborative programs for the benefit of NCICU campuses. She joined NCICU in 1986 and has served as president since 1992.

Dr. Williams received her undergraduate degree from Duke University, an MPA from North Carolina State University, and a Ph.D. in Education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a member of the Governor's Education Cabinet, received the 2023 Trailblazer Award from the NC ACE Women's Network, and was named a 2017 CEO of the Year by the Triangle Business Journal. She is immediate past chair of the boards of MCNC, the North Carolina Aquarium Society, and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and chairs the board of Dupont Circle Investments. She also serves on the boards of the National Student Clearinghouse, College Foundation, Inc., the National Advisory Board of the Institute for Emerging Issues, the NCWorks Commission, the myFutureNC Commission, Communities in Schools of North Carolina, the Coalition for College Cost Savings, and the North Carolina Governors School Foundation.

Bonita Brown

Chancellor

Winston-Salem State University

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On May 29th, 2024, Bonita J. Brown was appointed as the 14th and first permanent female Chancellor at Winston-Salem State University. Prior to this role, she served as the Interim President at Northern Kentucky University (NKU). During her tenure, she led the campus through a leadership transition and in navigating significant financial challenges and declining enrollments. In her permanent role at NKU, she served as the Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer where she led the campus in implementing *Success by Design*, the university's strategic plan solely focused on student success. She previously worked as the Vice President of Network Engagement at Achieving the Dream, a national non-profit leader that champions evidence-based institutional improvement in community colleges across the country. In this role, Bonita was responsible for supporting a network of over 220 community colleges in 41 states as they work to implement sustainable, campus wide student success efforts. Prior to this position, she served as the Director of Higher Education Practice with the Education Trust in Washington, DC. While at the Education Trust, she created and led an initiative entitled Optimizing Academic Success and Institutional Strategy (OASIS), a national network of regional, comprehensive, minority serving institutions that enroll large numbers of low-income students and students of color. Previously she served as the Vice Chancellor and Chief of Staff and as Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trustees at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Over the course of her career, Mrs. Brown has also served as the Chief of Staff at the University of North Texas, General Counsel at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, and Assistant Attorney at Winston-Salem State University. Mrs. Brown received her BA in history from Wake Forest University and

her JD from Wake Forest University School of Law. She is married to Mr. Wesley Brown, and they have two children, Joshua Brown and Myliah Brown, and one granddaughter, Angelisse.

Cecilia Holden

LNC Class 23

President and CEO
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Cecilia Holden serves as the President and CEO for myFutureNC, a statewide initiative focused on the state's educational attainment goal. Among other public service, she served as the Chief of Staff for the North Carolina Department of Commerce and Director of Government and Community Affairs for the State Board of Education. Her private sector experience includes a career with IBM, as well as a Registered Investment Advisory firm. Holden holds a Master's in Business Administration from Duke University, a certificate in Public Administration from the University of North Carolina School of Government and a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science and Business from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

Dr. Beth Pitonzo

LNC Class 22

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Dr. Beth Pitonzo serves as the Senior Vice President of Instruction at Guilford Technical Community College, North Carolina's third-largest community college, serving over 30,000 students annually. As the second-in-command to the college president, she provides strategic leadership across GTCC's academic programs, institutional research, grant development, and select non-credit offerings. She also represents the president and the GTCC Board of Trustees in key initiatives and decision-making processes.

Since joining GTCC in 2012, Dr. Pitonzo has led transformative initiatives that have positioned the college as a nationally recognized leader in student success and workforce development. Notable achievements include leading the Gates Foundation's Completion by Design initiative and a Title III grant program that significantly improved retention and completion rates by expanding access to both cognitive and non-cognitive student support systems.

Dr. Pitonzo is deeply committed to fostering regional economic growth through education. She has worked extensively with external constituencies to develop legislative policy recommendations, support local economic development initiatives, and build strong industry partnerships that align educational programs with workforce needs. Her collaborative approach ensures that GTCC remains a vital resource for students and the broader community.

With over 34 years of experience in the community college sector, Dr. Pitonzo has held roles ranging from part-time faculty to senior administrator, serving institutions in Nevada, Oregon, and New Mexico. Before transitioning to higher education, she worked as a licensed Clinical Laboratory Scientist and research scientist in southern Nevada, collaborating with the US Department of Energy.

Dr. Pitonzo earned a Bachelor of Science in Clinical Laboratory Sciences from the University of Nevada, Reno; a Ph.D. in Biological Sciences from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; and a postgraduate certificate in Higher Education Leadership from Harvard University.

Mr. Maurice “Mo” Green

Superintendent

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As North Carolina’s State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Maurice “Mo” Green is committed to ensuring all students in public schools have access to a high-quality education and strives to create a brighter future for students, educators and communities across the state.

He has invested more than 20 years of his career in education in North Carolina, serving as a school district superintendent and deputy superintendent in two of the three largest districts in the state, a chief executive for a large foundation that awards grants supporting public education, and a school board attorney.

Green is a double Duke University graduate, with a bachelor’s degree in political science and economics and a law degree. He is married and has two adult children, both of whom graduated from North Carolina public schools.

Dr. Rodney Peterson

Superintendent

Person County Schools

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Dr. Rodney Peterson has served in public education for more than two decades and has led Person County Schools as Superintendent since 2017. Recently named the Burroughs Wellcome Fund 2026 A. Craig Phillips North Carolina Superintendent of the Year, Dr. Peterson is widely recognized for his commitment to academic excellence and equity for all students. His leadership has driven transformative initiatives that enhance instructional quality, integrate innovative technologies, and strengthen community partnerships, ensuring that every student is prepared for success in a rapidly changing world.

Prior to his tenure in Person County, Dr. Peterson held multiple leadership roles in Johnston County Schools, including area superintendent, chief academic officer, and executive director of support services. His career began in the classroom as a combination 3rd/4th-grade teacher at Benson Elementary School. As Superintendent, Dr. Peterson has championed programs such as the district's Dual Language Immersion initiative, launched in 2020, which promotes bilingualism and cultural competency while accelerating academic achievement. This program has expanded into a K–8 bilingual pathway, demonstrating measurable gains in student performance and narrowing achievement gaps.

Beyond his district leadership, Dr. Peterson actively contributes to the broader educational community. He has served as an adjunct professor at Campbell University and North Carolina State University. He participates in regional and state organizations, including the Person County Economic Development Commission, the Central Carolina Regional Education Service Alliance Board of Directors, and the North Carolina Association for Teaching, Learning, and Leading. Dr. Peterson holds a Bachelor of Arts in History and Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a Master of Education in Elementary Education from Campbell University, a Master of School Administration, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from North Carolina State University.

Ms. Jevelyn Bonner-Reed

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Jevelyn Bonner-Reed is the Executive Director of The Belk Foundation. The Belk Foundation is deeply committed to K-3 literacy and equitable access to effective teachers for all students, knowing that a solid start and access to excellent educators remain foundational to educational success. She previously served as the Chief Human Resources Officer for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WS/FCS). She also served as the Principal Pipeline Initiative Project Director and Director of Grant Innovation at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS).

Jevelyn holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from Michigan State University and Master of Business Administration from the Haas School of Business - University of California at Berkeley. Jevelyn also earned a Master's in Educational Leadership from the Broad Center for the Management of School Systems (now incorporated into the Yale School of Management). Jevelyn lives in the Charlotte area with her husband Alfred, and has twin sons in college, Vaughn and Rafael.

Dr. Elena Ashburn

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Dr. Elena Ashburn serves as the Senior Education Policy Advisor to North Carolina Governor Josh Stein. In this capacity, Elena works with a variety of stakeholders in advancing statewide education policy to ensure that every child in NC receives an excellent education.

Elena began her career in education with Teach For America, teaching English at Southern Durham High School. She went on to serve as a principal and area superintendent in the Wake County Public School System. Elena earned a doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where her research on the underrepresentation of women in the NC superintendency was featured globally. In 2021, Elena was named the North Carolina Principal of the Year.

Most importantly, Elena believes fiercely in the transformational power of a high-quality public education. She is married to Matt, a United Methodist Pastor, and together they are the proud parents of four school-aged children that keep them equally joyful and humble.

Ms. Meka S. Sales

Director of Special Initiatives
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Meka Sales joined the Endowment in 2007 after working as the childhood obesity program officer at the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund in Raleigh. During her tenure as a program officer, she gained experience managing large-scale health improvement initiatives and forming public and private partnerships to drive sustainable change. In 2016, Sales was promoted to her current role where she supports cross-sector collaborations that address critical public health challenges in the Carolinas. In 2025, Sales was appointed by NC Governor Josh Stein to serve on the state's Task Force on Child Care and Early Education.

Ms. Jill Cox

President and CEO
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LNC Class 31

For the past four years, Jill Cox has led Communities In Schools of North Carolina. As President & CEO, Cox leads the state's largest integrated student supports federated network of 18 affiliated organizations serving more than 130,000 students and families across the state. She has guided the CIS network through strategic growth and successfully navigated the challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic, driving the creation of new and innovative pathways for service delivery.

She brings more than 20 years of expertise in external and community relations, change management, and marketing strategy to the role and excels at implementing projects designed to drive organizational

effectiveness, build brand identity, influence policy, and grow resources under management. She also serves as co-chair of North Carolina's Child Fatality Task Force, is a member of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model statewide committee, and sits on the Governance and Accreditation Committee and the Network Vision Council for Communities In Schools national office, where she helps guide strategic direction and innovation on a national scale. Cox was selected to serve as part of Cohort 31 of Leadership North Carolina, the state's most prestigious leadership consortium, designed to engage leaders from across sectors in building a stronger, more vibrant North Carolina.

Cox has worked in both nonprofits and the public sector throughout her career and has served on a multitude of nonprofit boards and in other community volunteer roles. She earned her B.A. in Journalism from Southwest Texas State University and achieved the Duke Nonprofit Management Certificate. Cox is married and has two grown children.

Ms. Brittany Pruitt Fletcher

President and CEO

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Brittany Pruitt Fletcher, the President and CEO of United Way of North Carolina (UWNC), is a dynamic leader known for her resilience, empathy, and strategic vision. She holds three degrees from Appalachian State University: a Bachelor of Social Work, a Master of Business Administration, and a Master of Public Administration.

She joined the United Way family in 2015 as President and CEO of United Way of Davidson County, then served as Chief of Staff at United Way of Forsyth County. Since taking the helm of UWNC in 2022, Brittany has navigated significant organizational changes and one of the worst natural disasters in the state's history. In addition to her executive role, Brittany has been an adjunct professor at her alma mater, teaching non-profit management and grant strategies. She is also part of the inaugural cohort of United Way Worldwide's Next Generation Leaders Initiative and a certified facilitator of Strategic Foresight for Future-Ready Leadership through the Institute for the Future.

Brittany serves as Vice Chair for the Council of States, Chair of the Southeast Regional Conference (SERC) Planning Committee, and is a member of the Network Advisory Council (NAC) for United Way Worldwide.

Brittany calls Apex home, where she lives with her beloved Bernedoodle, Jaxon, and her playful tabby cat, Niko. In her free time, she enjoys listening to podcasts, traveling, spending time with family, and cheering on App State football.

Dr. David Stegall

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David Stegall, Ph.D., a North Carolina resident, most recently served as Chief of System Innovation at the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). A seasoned education leader with over 28 years of experience, David has held senior roles in North Carolina and internationally. He resides in the Wilmington area.

Prior to DoDEA, he was Deputy State Superintendent of Innovation and Chief Academic Officer at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, where he supported 1.6 million students across 115 school districts. He also served as Vice President for Global Education at GEMS Education, the world's largest K-12 school operator, overseeing schools across the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia.

David spent 11 years at Newton-Conover City Schools, including 5.5 years as superintendent. Under his leadership, the district transformed from a low-performing system into one where 100% of schools met or exceeded state growth targets. He led the creation of a national award-winning STEM school, a Leader in Me school, a dual-language school, and a state-recognized personalized learning model. The district ranked among the top five in North Carolina for graduation rates, exceeding 95% for five consecutive years.

His leadership has been recognized statewide and nationally. He was named NW NC Superintendent of the Year in 2017, a national Superintendent to Watch in 2016, NC's Outstanding Young Educator in 2012, and received the Champion for Children Award in 2021 from the NC Association of School Administrators.

David brings a strong commitment to educational innovation, equity, and student-centered success.

Class 33 Education Session Planning Committee

The following members of LNC Class 32 make up the planning committee for the Class 33 Education session.

Lisa Adkins *Transylvania*
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Lisa Adkins is a Senior Associate with Moss+Ross, bringing extensive expertise in major gifts fundraising, community engagement, donor and volunteer cultivation, executive coaching, strategic planning, and organizational leadership. She most recently served as Director of Development for myFutureNC. Prior to that, she was Vice President of Advancement at Blue Ridge Community College in Hendersonville, NC. Her career also includes leadership roles at the Buncombe County Schools Foundation, YMCA of Western North Carolina, Pardee Hospital Foundation, Indiana Humanities Council, and The Indianapolis Ballet. Lisa holds a Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communication from Texas A&M University, a Master of Science in Management and Leadership (MSML) from Western Governors University, and a Certification in Nonprofit Management (CFRM) from Indiana University. Lisa is a diehard Texas A&M football fan, is married to her husband, Tom, a 31-year veteran of the US Navy, has two daughters (Hailey and Madeline), and a goldendoodle (Lucy).

Ivan Canada, Session Co-Chair *Guilford*
President & CEO
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Ivan Canada is currently serving as the President & CEO of the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits. The NC Center is the only organization that supports the nonprofit sector as a statewide network of nonprofit leaders and partners.

Ivan served on his first nonprofit board over 20 years ago, and it not only helped him connect with his passion of community building and social change work, but it also opened his eyes to a career in the social sector. He is passionate about leadership, social change, and service to community, and has been involved with numerous nonprofits, foundations, civic organizations, over many years as a staff member, volunteer, and board member. He is currently serving as a board member with the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce, Carolina Pride Alum Network, Equality North Carolina, UNC-Greensboro Board of Visitors, and S.J. Edwards Foundation.

Ivan is a native North Carolinian and a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a bachelor's degree in economics and journalism and mass communication. He currently lives between Greensboro and Charlotte and works anywhere between Murphy and Manteo. Family and chosen family are important to him, he's a proud uncle to Ranger and River and his longtime partner, Jacob. When he's not traveling on I-40 or I-85, he enjoys listening to podcasts, the performing arts, traveling, attending live music events (concerts and festivals), reading, long walks or runs, and spending time with people over food and drinks.

Darryl Childers *Wake*

Assistant State Budget Officer
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Darryl Childers is an assistant state budget officer with the North Carolina Office of Budget and Management (OSBM). He has extensive experience working with underserved communities in North Carolina and abroad. Prior to his time with OSBM, Darryl served as a program officer with the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, managing the foundation's Community Progress Fund grant program and the Collaborative Problem-Solving grant program.

Before his time with the foundation, Darryl was a policy advisor for North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper. During his time with the Governor's Office, he advised on policy solutions in areas ranging from prison reform and reentry to the opioid epidemic, insurance coverage, and gun violence.

Previously, Darryl served as a community relations manager for the Cumberland Community Foundation in Fayetteville, NC, where he managed the Foundation's discretionary grantmaking process and special initiatives. He also served as a St. John Fellow at the Triangle Community Foundation, where he focused on grant program evaluation. His previous work experience also includes serving as an AmeriCorps member at the Gaston County Health Department and as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic.

Darryl also served as a board member for six years with the NC Center for Nonprofits. In his "free" time, Darryl acts as driver, coach, and tutor to his three sons.

Darryl has a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Davidson College and a Master of Public Policy degree from the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.

Andrew Gardner *Moore*

Associate Vice President, Workforce Strategies
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Dr. Andrew Gardner grew up in a military family, which meant moving across the country and abroad, sparking a lifelong love for travel and exploring new cultures and food. His adventurous spirit has led him to some of the world's most fascinating places, but it's the connections with people from different walks of life that have left the most significant impact. Andrew's passion for community engagement and education began during his volunteer work with a literacy council, which ultimately guided him toward a rewarding career in higher education.

An avid sports enthusiast, Andrew enjoyed playing basketball and running cross country and track during his high school years. Today, much of his energy is focused on helping his community and family. Whether it's shuttling his kids to various sports events or lending a hand with his wife's small business in Aberdeen, NC, Andrew is always on the move. Despite his busy schedule, he remains dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of those around him, reflecting the values instilled in him through his diverse upbringing.

Stephanie Lake *Wake*

Chief Operating Officer

Wake Technical Community College Foundation

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Stephanie Lake is on a mission to make higher education accessible for all. Her official responsibilities include developing the Foundation's fundraising and stewardship efforts while overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Foundation, including allocating \$5+ million in scholarships and wrap-around student support, as well as college and programmatic investments each year. She has been with the Foundation since 2004 and has more than 25 years of nonprofit management, grants, and fundraising experience.

Stephanie is committed to helping the most economically disadvantaged members of the community access quality education and training. She's spent the last ten years heavily involved in the volunteer leadership of the North Carolina Council for Resource Development, the statewide association serving community college development and grants officers charged with raising the funds to make education accessible to everyone across the state regardless of socioeconomic status.

Stephanie is enthusiastic about the arts, especially public art, and theatre (her first love) as well as state and national parks. She believes the arts and outdoor spaces should be for everyone and one of her "bucket list" items is visiting a state or national park in every state.

A native of "the Southeast" Stephanie moved to the Triangle in 2000 and now lives in Fuquay-Varina with her husband of 20 years, their three teenage children, and too many pets to name. In her free time, she is a YMCA group fitness junkie, avid gardener, and voracious reader and consumer of podcasts.

Collin McColskey-Leary *Wake*

Vice President, Program Impact and Innovation

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Collin McColskey-Leary, PhD, serves as the Vice President of Program Impact and Innovation at Communities In Schools of North Carolina (CISNC), where he leads a team dedicated to providing training and technical assistance to 17 independent CIS affiliates across the state and directly supporting students and youth in 30 counties. Prior to this, Collin worked at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute/National Implementation Research Network at UNC-Chapel Hill, developing the capacity of state and local education agencies and non-profit organizations to implement evidence-based practices, and at the Durham Children's Initiative (DCI) leading partnerships, evaluation, and fundraising.

Collin has held leadership roles at state-wide and community-based non-profit organizations partnering with communities and schools to improve child, student, youth, family, and community outcomes. Throughout his career, Collin has worked at the cross-section of the education and juvenile justice systems and community-based organizations with the goal of improving educational and social outcomes for marginalized students, youth, and families. Knowing that clients cannot benefit from what

they don't receive with fidelity, his career has focused on building and aligning high-impact organizational structures that support practitioners to implement programs and practices as intended.

Collin is a Goodmon Fellow and serves on the Board of Directors of the Durham Partnership for Children, where he co-chairs the kindergarten readiness committee, and Voices Together.

Molly Nagowski *Mecklenburg*

Government Relocation Program Manager

Duke Energy

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Molly Nagowski is the Government Relocation Program Manager for Duke Energy's Natural Gas Business Unit (NGBU). In this role, Molly leads coordination efforts between Governmental Agencies, such as Departments of Transportation and Municipal Works, and the NGBU to minimize conflicts between natural gas facilities and their civic improvement projects. Molly graduated from West Virginia University with a degree in Chemical Engineering. Prior to joining Duke, Molly worked for Dominion Energy managing pipeline replacement and enhancement programs in West Virginia. Molly started her career in a steel fabrication plant doing technical design. There, she became a certified welding inspector for nine years.

Molly moved to North Carolina in 2021 to pursue her career with Duke Energy. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends, attending Charlotte FC games, getting outdoors, and supporting her niece & nephews in their respective sports. Molly has a love for the arts and frequently attends events like musicals and concerts in Charlotte.

Chris Rivera, Program Chair *Mecklenburg*

Vice President, Business & Workforce Solutions

South Piedmont Community College

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Chris Rivera serves as Vice President of Business & Workforce Solutions at South Piedmont Community College, overseeing programs such as Apprenticeship, Work-Based Learning, Corporate Education, College and Career Readiness, and more. He is committed to fostering strong relationships with local businesses and industry partners in Union and Anson Counties. In his role, Chris develops innovative solutions and strategic partnerships that support both students and employers, keeping the College at the forefront of workforce development. His efforts have led to transformative opportunities, significantly impacting the local economy.

Chris emphasizes the importance of growing collaborations and synchronizing services to better serve both students and employers. By focusing on enhancing access to high-wage, in-demand jobs, he ensures that students are equipped with the skills needed for the evolving job market. His leadership has been instrumental in shaping the College's approach to business solutions, driving innovation in workforce development. As a result, South Piedmont Community College has solidified its reputation as a key player in regional economic growth.

Beyond his professional responsibilities, Chris is deeply involved in civic activities. He has served on the board of a federally qualified healthcare center for eight years, contributing to community health

initiatives. As a DEI committee member at the Union County Chamber of Commerce, Chris advocates for inclusive practices that benefit the entire community. His role as co-chair of an educational attainment collaborative further highlights his dedication to improving educational outcomes.

Chris's civic involvement and professional achievements reflect his holistic approach to community and workforce development.

Kristi Snuggs, Session Co-Chair *Johnston*

President

Early Years

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Kristi Snuggs currently serves as the President of Early Years, a nonprofit organization whose vision is to ensure that all children have equitable access to affordable, high-quality early care and education to lay the foundation for successful life outcomes. A pre-med major in college with the dream of becoming a practicing pediatrician, she served over 20 years in the community college system both at the local and state levels as an Instructor, Department Chair, Educational Consultant, and Vice President of Instruction/Chief Academic Officer. She left the System to become the Chief Program Officer for a multi-faceted, non-profit Community Action Agency that administered a variety of anti-poverty programs. In 2018, she returned to state government as the Deputy Director and later Director of the Division of Child Development and Early Education.

Kristi believes in giving back to her community and serving in many volunteer capacities. She is an active member of Wendell Baptist Church where she serves as a deacon, Life Group Director, and Sunday School Teacher. She also owns Xtreme Carolina Athletics, a competitive cheer and tumble gym in Wendell, NC. She has devoted her life to coaching cheer and tumble for children and youth.

Kristi holds a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from East Carolina University and master's and bachelor's degrees from Appalachian State University. She is married to Phillip. They have two adult daughters, Kali and Keslee, both of whom were recently married, a lovable Great Pyrenees named Kobi, and a grandson named Lawson.

Mariam Tisdale *Mecklenburg*

Chief Operating Officer

Road to Hire

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Mariam Tisdale is Chief Operations Officer for Road to Hire. Most recently, she served as the Chief of Staff for Teach For America (TFA) in North Carolina. She began her career with TFA in 2004 as a corps member in the Mississippi Delta, where she earned recognition as both New Teacher of the Year and Teacher of the Year.

Following her success in the classroom, Mariam transitioned to TFA staff, initially as a teacher coach and later leading TFA's corps member program in Charlotte. When TFA consolidated its North Carolina regions under a statewide Executive Director, Mariam was appointed as the first Chief of Staff. In this role, she is a key strategic partner to the ED and leads the people and operations team. Amid significant

change, Mariam played a pivotal role in architecting a culture that elevated staff engagement, increasing culture scores by over 30% during her tenure, surpassing nonprofit industry standards.

Mariam holds a BA in Journalism and Mass Communication with a concentration in Public Relations and a second major in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She also earned a Master's degree in Leadership and Human Resources Management from Northeastern University. Mariam is an alumna of the Aspen Executive Seminar.

Residing in Davidson, NC, Mariam chairs the Affordable Housing and Equity Board elected by the Town of Davidson Board of Commissioners. In her free time, Mariam enjoys hiking with her dog, Charley, in the North Carolina mountains—having visited all 41 state parks across the state—and cheering on the Tar Heels.

Demarcus Williams *Durham*

Director of Communications

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities

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Demarcus Williams is a 2003 graduate of NC State University with a bachelor's degree in graphic design. He completed his master's in business administration in 2020 at Grand Canyon University. He serves as Director of Communications for North Carolina Independent Colleges & Universities. As Director of Communications, Demarcus serves as NCICU's chief marketing and communications officer, overseeing all communication initiatives of the independent sector of NC higher education in support of NCICU's 36 colleges and universities. Demarcus also serves as the Associate Vice President of Global Marketing & Communications at Saint Augustine's University. In addition, Demarcus owns FRESHDESIGNZ, LLC, a Graphic Design firm that serves small and medium-sized businesses.

Demarcus is a licensed elder with the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc. (PAW), and has been a member of Greater Emmanuel Temple of Grace, in Durham, NC, serving as an Associate Pastor and Director of Evangelism. Demarcus served as Young People's Union president of the North Carolina State Council, the 58th Episcopal District of PAW, from 2014-2022. In 2022, Demarcus received the first Bishop Norman L. Wagner Outstanding Young People's Union President Award in the organization's history during the PAW international summer convention.

In the community, Demarcus serves on several boards and committees both locally and statewide, including as a commissioner for the NC Commission for Volunteerism and Community Service, appointed by the Office of the Governor, Josh Stein (NC), and as a member of the board of directors for the NC State Alumni Association, and Central Wake High School.

Keisha Williams *Wake*

Assistant Vice President, Duke Learning and Organization Development

Duke University

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Keisha Williams serves as the Assistant Vice President, Learning and Organization Development, for Duke University and Health System. Her department provides services to the University and Health

System through three prongs: Leadership Development, Professional Development, and Consulting Services. In her role she collaborates with colleagues in quality performance improvement to design and implement process improvements where needed, ensures alignment of talent management activities across the enterprise, provides learning development strategies and programs that deliver business results, and continually assesses organizational status in terms of talent utilization, performance development, capacity, motivation, and other organizational effectiveness indicators.

She previously served as the Executive Director of University Organizational and Professional Development at Virginia Tech. A few of the core initiatives that she spearheaded for the university are the succession planning efforts and a periodic review process for senior level administrators. Previously she helped found the Emerging Leaders in Public Health (ELPH), a minority-based leadership program focusing on managing through financial, human resource, and communication crisis; and Management Academy, a program focusing on management and the development of a business plan at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Through her work with executive programs, she specializes in ongoing leadership coaching to groups and individuals.

She received an undergraduate degree in Political Science from UNC-Charlotte with a minor in Spanish and a master's degree in Public Administration from North Carolina Central University.